



Public Service Announcement

What Carbon Monoxide Does to You

Provided by your

Local Emergency Management Office



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Too much carbon monoxide in your blood will kill you. Most of us know to try to avoid this. Less well known is the fact that low-level exposure to this gas also endangers your health. One of the truths of our human bodies is that, given a choice between carbon monoxide and oxygen, the protein hemoglobin in our blood will always latch on to carbon monoxide and ignore the life-giving oxygen. Because of this natural chemical affinity, our bodies – in effect – replace oxygen with carbon monoxide in our bloodstream, causing greater or lesser levels of cell suffocation depending on the intensity and duration of exposure.

The side effects that can result from this low-level exposure include permanent organ and brain damage. Infants and the elderly are more susceptible than healthy adults, as are those with anemia or heart disease. The symptoms of low-level carbon monoxide poisoning are so easily mistaken for those of the common cold, flu or exhaustion, that proper diagnosis can be delayed. Because of this, be sure to see your physician about persistent, flu-like symptoms, chronic fatigue or generalized depression. If blood levels of carbon monoxide are found to be high, treatment is important. Meanwhile, it makes good sense to put heating system inspection and maintenance on your annual get-ready-for winter list. Prevention is the best cure.